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SERMON

Preached to the

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

AT

St. Mary-le-Bow,

ON

Monday, *January* the 15th, 1733.

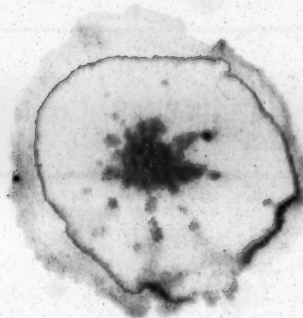
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Vicar of St. SEPULCHRE'S.

L O N D O N,

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665





ISAIAH LIX. 19.

*When the Enemy shall come in like a
Flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall
lift up a Standard against him.*



THE Prophet, in the Context, gives a Description of the heinous Sins against GOD and Man, committed by the Jews, together with their dark and unhappy Condition, consequent thereupon ; their Hearts were Sources of evil Thoughts, which their Mouths discharged in perverse Words, and their Hands and Feet were forward to execute ; their Iniquity was such, that it broke off Communion with Almighty GOD ; that it stood, as a Cloud, intercepting their Prayers, that they could not ascend to the Throne of Mercy ; and left them in a dark and desolate State, with no Prospect of Peace and Happiness, but with the sad Prognostics of approaching Ruin. The deadly Contagion was so far spread through every Rank and Condition

4 A S E R M O N *before the SOCIETIES*

of Men, that not one could be found to stand in the Breach, and divert the Wrath of Almighty GOD from the Sinners Heads. *He saw that there was no Man, (ver. 16.) and wondred that there was no Intercessor*: In this Distress, Mercy interposed, and set up a Standard to oppose Wickedness come in upon them like a sweeping Flood, and restore Truth and Virtue to the Earth. The Chapter is a Prophecy of that which should happen in remote Times, and relates to the moral and religious State of the Jewish Church, when the Son of GOD should be ready to come and abolish Sin, and destroy the Devil, by his own Death; that is, the Chapter foretels, that the Period allotted to the Jewish Oeconomy being almost ended, the Sins of the Nation would become so great, that the Spirit of GOD would lift up a Standard in Jesus Christ, both GOD and Man, who should put a Stop to the growing Wickedness, and destroy the Devil, the Author of it.

THAT in Christ's Time there was such a Decline in the Jewish Church, the Gospel informs us in the clearest Terms. The Truth was corrupted (a), both prophetic and moral, with false Glosses; and some were so blinded, as to dare to maintain (b) *there was no Resurrection, neither Angel nor Spirit*; the ritual Law, appointed for a Time, was observed by them with more Exactness than the Duties of Love, which always oblige, (c) *for they passed over Judgment and the Love of God*. They were
more

(a) Mat. xv. 3—10. Acts xiii. 27.
(b) Acts xxiii. 8. (c) Luke xi. 42.

more intent on (a) washing the Hands, than purifying the Heart; on a Form of Godliness, than the Power of it. Their Charity (b) to Men, and Devotion (c) to GOD, were done in a Manner, that shewed their Intention was popular Applause, or to cover (d) Hypocrisy with other Wickedness abounding in them. They were Lovers (e) of the World, more than of GOD; Rebels in their Heart against GOD's Ordinance (f), the Civil Magistrate; and Despisers (g) of others, who had less Shew of external Righteousness, but more Humility from a Sense of their Sins. Their false Zeal in building (h) the Sepulchres of antient Prophets, was a dark Prelude to their finishing their Wickedness with the worst of Crimes, the publick Crucifixion of the Son of GOD; in short, their Righteousness was such, as none could (i) be saved by; and their Wickedness so great, they could hardly *escape* (k) the Damnation of Hell.

AND that Christ was raised up for a Standard or Ensign in this Distress, to revive the Knowledge and Practice of Truth, and abolish Sin with the Author of it, when the World was weak, and none could oppose them but Divine Power, is clear from *Isaiab*, as well as *St. John*; from the Prophet *Isaiab* in these Words, *in that Day* (l) *there shall be a Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an Ensign of the People; to it shall the Gentiles seek: parallel*
to

(a) Mark vii. 3.

(d) Matth. xxiii. 25—29.

(f) Matth. xxii. 15—23.

(b) Matth. xxiii. 29, &c.

(k) Matth. xxiii. 33.

(b) Matth. vi. 2. (c) Ver. 5.

(e) Luke xvi. 14. John v. 44.

(g) Luke xviii. 9—15.

(i) Matth. v. 20.

(l) Isa. xi. 10.

6 A SERMON before the SOCIETIES

to which are the Words of Christ in the Gospel of St. *John*, and *I, if I be lifted up from the Earth (a), will draw all Men unto me: this he said, signifying what Death he should die; by which Death undergone on the Cross, he destroyed him (b) that had the Power of Death, that is, the Devil.*

THE same Method of raising up Persons of Knowledge and Faith, was observed by Providence on like Occasions at other Junctures. *Abraham (c)* was called both to check the Progress of increasing Idolatry, and to put a Stop to the Conquests and Successes of those Princes, who were Patrons of it, and in whose Dominions the Error began. And to pass by others, both eminent Persons and Bodies of Men, who were timely raised to support Virtue, and confound Vice, *Josiah* appeared, according to Prophecy, to purge the Land from their Ancestors' sins, to renew the Covenant with Almighty God, and prevent, if possible, by a thorough Reformation, the impending Ruin, which soon followed after his Death, through the Peoples Obstinacy, and the Prince's Folly.

WHAT has been done in our own Days, or what Standard God has set up to suppress Wickedness, we may see with Pleasure in this awful Place, where excellent Persons of different Ranks and eminent Stations, would not have assembled at this Time, if the Cause of God, the Love of Mankind, and the Good of the Publick, had not engaged them in the pious Design

(a) John xii. 32, 33. see also ch. iii. 14. which compare with Numb. xxi. 8, 9. (b) Heb. ii. 14. (c) Gen. xiv.

Design of stemming the Torrent of abounding Wickedness. What the Sins are which have given an Occasion to this Stand, we very well know ; they are not concealed in dark Corners and secret Recesses, but thrust themselves upon us, wheresoever we go ; and overgrown Wickedness walks in our Streets, with the Air and Impudence of a bold Strumpet.

I SHALL not entertain you with the long Detail of so horrid a Scene, which Action must remedy, and not Words. I shall only beg leave to touch by the way on two or three Sins of the largest Size, by which we may judge unto what Stature Sin has attained in the present Age.

THE first is, *Apostacy from revealed Truth*. If the Scriptures were delivered by Persons acted by the Holy Ghost, as Christians believe on the best Evidence, which has stood the Test of many Generations, and cannot give way to modern Attacks, having always triumphed in like Encounters with rude Infidels, the Scheme of Religion contained in them, or the Gospel Scheme, is the Counsel of God, or the Method of Providence, foretold by the Prophets, and established in Jesus the Son of *Mary*, of the Seed of *David*, by which he decreed to deliver Man from the Guilt of Sin, and the Power of Death. The Substance of which is in short this, that a great King, Prophet, and Priest, the Head of Mankind, both the Son of GOD, and the Son of Man, should appear in the World to restore Truth, to renew Righteousness, and to save Man from the Consequences of Sin ; and that at a Time, when the State of the
World

8 *A SERMON before the SOCIETIES*

World should be so far depraved by a long Progress in Error and Vice, that nothing could prevail to divert the Stroke of Divine Justice, but his great Merit, Intercession, and Sacrifice ; and that Jesus Christ was this Prince and Deliverer, proved to be such by a punctual Accomplishment of ancient Prophecies, respecting the Time of his first Coming ; by a Course of Miracles during his Ministry, which none could perform but the great God, who created all Things ; and after his Death, by his rising again in the same Body, a Pledge and Assurance to all Believers of the like Issue of their Life of Faith, working by Love. This with the Truths relating to the Spirit, is the Sum of a Doctrine firmly established on the clearest Evidence, believed by Men of the greatest Abilities in all Ages, justified in the Lives of eminent Saints and Martyrs dispersed through the World, and received into States, as the purest Means to train up the People in the several Duties of the social Life, and for future Happiness. Now the Scriptures containing these weighty Truths, in Defiance to Evidence, to the Sense of the Learned, to National Wisdom, and the Fitness of the Scheme to the Circumstances of Men, are openly attacked as Forgery and Imposture by hardy Spirits, who do not consider, they confirm the Truth of what they oppose, by fulfilling the Prophecies contained in them ; and with so much Spleen, as may usually be expected from unsettled Minds, which, not satisfied with their own Systems, relieve their Uneasiness by the rough Assaults which they make

make on others ; and to what End ? but to set up a Faculty as supreme Guide, which, without Revelation, cannot discover the Counsel of God ; and which, biassed by Appetites, and temporary Views, can never produce a consistent Scheme of Doctrines and Precepts in different Persons, whose ruling Passions are not the same. As Pride runs through this whole Management, which will not permit them to think themselves such, as Scripture describes them in their natural State ; and they scorn to be Debtors for their Future Happiness to another's Merit, which they hope to gain by their own Conduct ; and as Habit has advanced them to the Scorners's Seat, there is little Hope of reforming these, but by such Method as *Solomon* prescribes, *Smite the Scorners, and the Simple will beware* (a).

THE second Sin, is that of *Uncleanness*, the natural Consequent of the Love of Error : For if Men fall from the Spirit of God, which sanctifies the Body, it is no Wonder they become Slaves to the Lusts of it. Having turned their Backs to the Means of Salvation appointed of God, they have no solid and well-grounded Hope of their Future Happiness, no lasting and firm Peace in their own Minds, the pure Effect of Righteousness and Truth, nor any Testimony of a good Conscience. In this Uncertainty and Darkness within, they are forced to look for the Comfort without, which they cannot find in their own Bosom ; sensible Objects are the Goods applied to for this purpose ; the importunate Appetite is chiefly indulged ;

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and

(a) Prov. xix. 25.

and the Reason they boast of, is vilely employed to defend the Practice: Nay, this sort of Commerce is so tenderly thought of, in certain Circumstances, by some People, that the BIBLE it self has been tampered with by them, and a new Version published to the World, with such Variations from the old Text, as would almost persuade us they were purposely made for the Sake of those, who retaining a Reverence for this Book, could not be expected to comply with a Practice condemned in it; for *Harlot* and *Whore*, the common Appellations for unmarried Women lewdly consorting with unmarried Men, are changed into (a) Terms, which seem to be designed to exclude all, but the worse Sinners of the lewd Kind, from the Number branded with those Names.

IF the wanton Appetite be not restrained in its first Sallies, what Security can the Sober have, that it will not advance to greater Excess, and invade the Right and Property of others? and what Confusion will not ensue in the conjugal State upon such Insults? mutual Affection and Confidence will cease; Families be corrupted with a vile Issue, multiplied for the Sword, the Pestilence, and the Famine, or other Calamities; Education be neglected; the Parents punished in the Vices and Rebellions of their wicked Children, and the Children undone by the bad Example of their worse Parents; and publick Prosperity founded on the Prudence of Family-Oeconomy will sink with it.

BUT

(a) See New Version, Matth. xxi. 31. Luke xv. 31. 1 Cor. vi. 15. Heb. xi. 31. James ii. 25.

BUT the worst Sin of the lewd Kind, is *Unnatural Lust*, an outward Sign of an inward Apostacy from GOD's Word. St. Paul mentions it as a Crime prevailing in the Dregs of Time; *They changed, says he, the Glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible (a) Man, and to Birds, and four footed Beasts, and creeping Things. — For this Cause, God gave them up unto vile Affections, &c.* Apostacy from GOD gave an Occasion to the heinous Sin, and the heinous Sin practised by many, shewed the Extent of the Apostacy from GOD. If we look o'er the Catalogue which the Apostle gives us of the Sins of the Times, we shall soon see that none could be worse. The blackest Iniquity may sometime be acted in the best Days, but when Numbers are concerned, the Extent of the Cause is known from the Effect. *There were Sodomites in the Land (b),* was a Mark of Infamy, when Idolatry revived, and Uncleanness followed as the Shadow of it; the taking away whom, is mentioned with Honour of King *Asa*, as a visible Proof, that *he did (c) right in the Eyes of the Lord*; and is Part of the Character of good *Jehoshaphat*, who finished (d) the Work of rooting out this vile and abominable Race, which his Father had begun. As this great Sin discovered of late in the Practice of many, is a Sign of Infidelity secretly propagated, so the vigorous Efforts made to suppress it, may be looked on, I hope, as the Effect of the Grace and Goodness of GOD, as a comfortable Omen that his

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King-

(a) Rom. i. 23, 26.

(c) 1 Kings xv. 11, 12.

(b) 1 Kings xiv. 24.

(d) — xxii. 46.

Kingdom will be suffered to continue with us, and in part, a fulfilling of the Words of my Text. A late Adversary to revealed Truth, in touching on the War that was made on *Benjamin* by the other Tribes, for attempting the Wickedness I now speak of, though they failed in it, and for practising another of a lesser Kind, or probably the same, with the utmost Greediness, calls it, *a Quarrel the oddest that ever was*(a), though the Offenders were protected by the whole Tribe, and the Crime such as threatned to root out the whole Nation, if it were not restrained by timely Reproof; but such are the Sentiments of these Moralists, and such the Reformation the World must expect.

‘ THE third Sin is, *Open Perjury in Courts of Justice*. An Oath is a solemn and religious Act, where the Person swearing, calls upon GOD, the impartial Judge, and most sure Avenger of false Dealing, to witness the Truth of something affirmed or denied by him; which, if not performed with an honest Mind, is a heinous Crime in respect of GOD, of the Civil Magistrate, of the Person injured, and the false Swearer.

‘ IN respect of GOD: For the hardened Wretch, who touches the Gospels with a Hand defiled with the Works of Wickedness, and kisses the Book with deceitful Lips, in order to testify and establish a Lie, is guilty of a Sin, which in Truth implies, whatsoever Appearance it may outwardly have, that

(a) Christianity as old, &c. p. 348.

What is thus mark'd [‘] was not delivered in the Preaching.

‘ that he does not believe that there is
‘ any GOD, the Witness and Avenger of false
‘ Swearing, or that any Providence governs the
‘ World; that the Scriptures he swears on, are
‘ a sacred System of Doctrines and Precepts
‘ given by GOD; and that any better and
‘ more useful Guide can be followed by him,
‘ than his own Sense and Opinion of Things,
‘ howsoever disagreeable to publick Laws, if
‘ he can but escape the Penalties of them. Such
‘ is the Contempt which is flung upon GOD,
‘ and his holy Word, by the Sin of Perjury.

‘ IN respect of the *Magistrate*; who, not
‘ being present in all Places at all Times, must
‘ take Information from others Report, and act
‘ in Conformity to the Evidence given. In
‘ which Case, the Civil Authority may be so
‘ far abused by mischievous Tongues, represent-
‘ ing Matters in a false Light, as to miss of the
‘ End for which it was ordained, the Encou-
‘ ragement of Virtue, and the Punishment of
‘ Vice; and the Sword be directed at the Head
‘ of those whom it ought to protect; and un-
‘ happily imployed to protect those whom it
‘ ought to punish; a Misfortune so great, that
‘ perhaps a greater can hardly happen to a good
‘ Magistrate, intent on the Benefit of each In-
‘ dividual, as well as the whole.

‘ IN respect of the *Injured*: For the false
‘ Swearer dresses the Innocent in his own Crimes,
‘ and appears adorned with the other’s Virtues;
‘ by which Fraud, he gains the Encourage-
‘ ment due to Virtue; and the Honest and
‘ Just, the Rewards of Wickedness. Where
‘ this prevails, there is no Security; nothing we
‘ enjoy

' enjoy can be called our own, but a good Con-
 ' science, and GOD's Favour. The Labour of
 ' Years, and the sweet Fruits of a painful In-
 ' dustry, may be snatched from us in a Mo-
 ' ment of Time by a perjured Tongue. Vir-
 ' tuous may be turned into vicious Actions ;
 ' Credit and Interest, the outward Advantages
 ' of a good Life, may be suddenly sunk ; and
 ' the best of Men be put on a Level with the
 ' worst Subjects by the Magic of it ; especi-
 ' ally those, who, resisting the Progress of a-
 ' bounding Wickedness, are exposed thereby to
 ' its Lash and Venom above others. *A Man*
 ' *that beareth false Witness against his Neigh-*
 ' *bour, says Solomon (a), is a Maul, and a Sword,*
 ' *and a sharp Arrow.*

' IN respect of the *Perjured* : For he who
 ' swears, renounces the Help of Almighty GOD,
 ' if he do not speak in Sincerity and Truth.
 ' *So help me God*, says he, that is, as the Word
 ' is true, or the Promise sure, which his Lips
 ' have uttered. By which it appears, that the
 ' false Swearer forfeits the Protection and Fa-
 ' vour of GOD, the greatest Loss which a Man
 ' can sustain on this Side the Grave. For no-
 ' thing can conduct us, but GOD's Grace, thro'
 ' the various Trials of this Life ; can direct our
 ' Counsels, prosper our Endeavours, and at last
 ' convey us through the Gates of Death, to e-
 ' ternal Happiness. Sad then is his State, who,
 ' stripped of the Help and Protection of GOD,
 ' is exposed thereby to the manifold Ills, which
 ' the Cunning of Men, and the Malice of Sa-
 ' tan, may contrive against him ; who always
 ' rang-

(a) Prov. xxv. 18.

‘ ranging, like a hungry Lion, through the wide
‘ World, devours faithless and unhappy Souls,
‘ which forsake the Fortrefs of Divine Power.
‘ For the perjured Man (*a*) is hated of GOD, as
‘ a bold Profaner of his holy Name ; the Justice
‘ he appealed to, daily (*b*) pursues him ; the
‘ Cries of the Injured testify against him, and
‘ call for Vengeance ; the Curse due to his
‘ heinous Wickedness preys (*c*) on his Family
‘ like a foul Leprosy, or an eating Canker ; and
‘ the profane Tongue, shall be (*d*) burnt
‘ and tortured with eternal Fire. Such is the
‘ Damage which results on the perjured and
‘ deceitful Man, from his Sin against GOD, the
‘ Magistrate, his Neighbour, and his own Soul.

I MIGHT add something of the various Forms which Sin has appeared in among others, who seem to profess the Religion of Christ ; such as, Cursing and Swearing, notorious Frauds and Breaches of Trust, Violence and Rapine, with other Vices obvious to most ; but I hast to speak of the Cause and Remedy.

THE inward Cause, as is well known, is the Principle of Sin subsisting in the Nature derived from *Adam* ; but the Doctrine of Christ being published to the World to prevent its Increase, and instruct the Mind in Virtue and Truth, a Question may be asked, how it comes to pass, that it has not obtained the desired Effect ? The best Answer I can possibly make, and what I am perswaded is the chief Reason, is the great Neglect of the sacred Books, contain-

(*a*) Prov. vi. 16, 19. (*b*) ch. xix. 5, 21, 28. (*c*) Zech. v. 3, 4.

(*d*) Psalm cxx. 3. Old Version, *comp. with* James iii. 6.

taining the Rule both of Faith and Manners ; my Meaning is this, that Error and Vice could never have spread into all Ranks, nor attained to that Stature, Confidence, and Strength, which they have at present, had the Word of GOD been allowed a Place in every Family, and been read and considered with a Zeal equal to the Importance of it. There is no Hope of a publick Reformation but from that of Families ; nor of that of Families, but from some perfect and adequate Rule, unmixed with the Fancies and Errors of Men, which Masters and Parents may all depend on as a sure Director of their own Conduct ; and by Help of which, they may teach, correct, and educate others under their Care, for the honest Support of the Business of Life, and the Blessing of GOD in the next World. Were the Bible often in every one's Hand, the Doctrine it contains would be written on his Heart, and impressed upon his Mind ; it would spread its Influence through the whole Man, and furnish him with proper and instructive Thoughts on every Occasion inviting him to sin. But without the Direction of GOD's Word, and the Grace accompanying the Knowledge of it, each must be guided by his own Light, imperfect as it is, which, secretly biased by some ruling Passion, will ever be forward to determine for the Flesh, where Flesh is concerned, and not for the Cause of Virtue and Truth, or according to the Nature and Reason of Things.

THIS then being the Case, the first Step towards a publick Reformation by amending
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Families, is to do our Endeavour, that the Use of the BIBLE be revived in them. The Doctrine is derived from the Spirit of GOD, who, perfect in Knowledge, adapts his Laws to the Nature and Circumstances of Mankind, and does not oppress them with unprofitable Truth. The End it proposes, is the Vision of GOD; and the Means is such, as cannot be met with in any System of Doctrines and Precepts, that solely proceed from rational Light, being the pure Effect of the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of GOD, which none could discover till himself revealed it by his own Spirit. It shews us our Corruption, as a faithful Mirror the Blemishes of the Face; the Misery we are exposed to without a Remedy; the Nature of the Remedy provided by GOD; the Manner of applying it, or Conditions requisite on Man's Part, to obtain the Benefit; the present Advantage of such Application; and the future Blessing in the State of Glory. Its Pages swell with so copious, instructive, and delightful a Variety of Facts and Remarks, Exhortations and Precepts, relating to private and publick Life, to Persons and Communities; and open so large and surprizing a Scene of divine Oeconomy, that it truly may be said, that the Order of Nature and civil Prosperity depend on the Knowledge and Practice of them. For certain it is, that the publick Peace and Welfare of the Jews, and their natural Blessings, were more or less, as the Law was regarded or neglected by them; and there is no Reason to expect less

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from

from a constant Adherence to the Gospel of Christ.

BUT further ; the Book of GOD should often be read with Attention equal to the Importance of it : *Be read often* ; to renew the Memory of what we have learned, which might otherwise be lost in the Torrent of Business rolling in upon us every Day. For the Doctrines relating to the Person, Dignity, and Ministry of Christ, the Trinity in Unity, and the Method of Salvation, being transmitted to us in the sacred Books, and not discoverable by meer Reason or natural Light, might soon be forgotten, if they were not impressed and fixed in the Mind, by frequent Recourses to GOD's Word. The same must be said of the moral Law, the Duties of which are summed up in Love, which should bear a Proportion in the Gospel Oeconomy to (a) the Love of GOD in his Son Christ. It must also be read *with Attention* by our selves, and with Diligence to our Families ; and the Passages compared, the dark with the clear, that the Light of one may illustrate the other, till the whole be digested, and become a Part of our own selves : *Ye shall teach your Children*, says GOD, speaking of them, *when thou sittest in thine House* (b), *and when thou walkest by the Way ; when thou liest down, and when thou risest up : And Solomon, When thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee* (c). The Psalmist was so zealous in con-

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(a) 1 John iv. 10, 11. John xiii. 34. xv. 12.

(b) Deut. vi. 7.

(c) Prov. vi. 22.

versing with the Law, or meditating on it, that he says, *Mine Eyes prevent the Night-watches, that I might meditate in thy Word (a)*. And the Advantage was such, that he gratefully declares it in these Words, *Thou (b) through thy Commandments hast made me wiser than mine Enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more Understanding than all my Teachers, for thy Testimonies are my Meditation. I understand more than the Antients, because I keep thy Precepts.*

THE Business of the World should be no Objection in this Case; for the Knowledge of Truth, which quickens the Soul, is of more Concern to the Happiness of Man, than a temporal Interest affecting the Body, and extending no farther than this Life. The most busy Men, howsoever oppressed with the Weight of Affairs, will yet find Leisure to refresh the Body, and why not the Soul? will dedicate Evenings to Company and Mirth, and why not a Part of their spare Time to converse with Scripture, a sure Guide, a Comforter in Trouble, a Fund of solid and concealed Pleasure, *sweeter (c) than Honey, and the Honey-comb*, and surpassing in Value the greatest Treasure?

IF those who attend on the Business of Shops, would employ Part of their dead Hours every Day, when Trade intermits, in reading the Bible, and not in a listless and idle Posture, or in gazing on the Crowd that passes by the Door, or amuzing the Mind with unprofitable Books, or mischievous Pamphlets, which the Age abounds with, the unhappy Product of misemployed

ployed Heads; and if other Persons of higher Stations, and greater Talents, would not be backward to consult a Rule designed for the Benefit of all Ranks and Conditions of Men, what an Improvement would they not make in Knowledge and Practice? how would they be able to cast off the Impressions of Error and Vice? the important Truth would be uppermost in their Minds; their Heart would burn with the Love of it; and the Mouth speak from the Abundance of the Heart. Conversation would turn on the right Foot; and religious Discourse, accounted by many an unfit Entertainment for polite Company, would recover its Credit in the Interview of Friends, and prove a Refreshment, exceeding any thing that Wealth could afford for the Pleasure of Sense. But the Practice of some is an evident Proof, that their spare Hours are otherwise spent, than in reading and meditating on GOD's Word.

THE poorer Sort, who have little Pleasure in this World, should, above others, seek for their Comfort in this Book, and support their Spirits in their low State, with the Hope of the Promises contained in it; but Experience teaches us, it is quite otherwise with many of them. They do not fly to the Word of GOD for Relief in their Trouble, Labour, and Pain, but to Publick-houses, looking no further than the little Refreshment they find there, the Effect of which being soon over, they repeat the Remedy, till in Process of Time they ruin their Body to quiet their Mind. It is much to be feared,

feared, that the Word of GOD is the only Necessary which they have not purchased; for it is scarce credible, but so good a Book, were it always by them, would invite them sometime to look into it; or that any could read, and not be reprov'd, or instructed by it. The first Impression, which is thus made, might prepare the Way for a second Thought, and gently lead them to higher Sentiments, and a better Conduct. For the Word of GOD (a) is *like as a Fire, — and like a Hammer that breaketh the Rocks in Pieces. It is quick (b), and powerful, and sharper than any two edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart.* There is enough plain for the meanest Capacity; the Grace of GOD will never be wanting to sincere Hearts; and the Learned are near to resolve Difficulties.

IF any be so poor, that their small Income, which their bodily Wants continually demand, is the true Reason, that they are not provided with this Book; in such case, to procure them *That* which they cannot purchase, or to use their Endeavours that the Word of GOD, the Food of the Soul, be reduced to a Price, which does not exceed the Condition of the Poor, is a Work worthy of the Bounty of the Rich, and Authority of the Great. For the high Price is a Famine of the Word. Whatsoever abundance the Shops may afford, it is not for those who cannot be Purchasers, for on other Terms they will

(a) Jer. xxiii. 29.

(b) Heb. iv. 12.

will hardly be supplied, if they be not relieved by liberal Hands. But the generous Pity, which you shewed to Christians of remote Countries, in the rich Present of sacred Books, which you sent among them in their own Language, is a Ground of Hope to our own Poor, that you cannot observe their necessitous State in your own Gates, near your own Doors, without extending convenient Relief according to your Power. For it no less concerns us to preserve Christianity in our own Land, than to use our Endeavours to revive it abroad.

I cannot but observe before I proceed to the next Head, that the great Reformations wrought in the Church, and the firm Adherence of private Christians, to the true Faith in persecuting Times, were each owing to the sacred Books, either publickly read, or privately studied. *Ezra reformed (a) upon this Foot; they read in the Book, in the Law of God distinctly, and gave the Sense, and caused them to understand the Reading. And so did Josiah, guided therein by the very Book, which the Lawgiver left them for a certain Standard of pure Doctrine to succeeding Ages; he read in their Ears all the Words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the House of the Lord (b) — and made a Covenant before the Lord, — to perform the Words of the Covenant, which are written in this Book.* As Idolatry vanished at the Light of them, so the Gentile Converts could not be reduced to their old Superstition by the worst Treatment, so

(a) Nehem. viii. 8. see also, ver. 13, 14. ch. ix. 3, 38. x. 29.

(b) 2 Chron. xxxiv. 30, 31.

so long as the Scriptures continued in their Hands, and were read in private. Hence it came to pass that the Persecutors Rage fell on the BIBLE as well as on the Pastors, the removing of whom from their several Flocks could avail little, while their Place was supplied by so perfect a Guide as the Gospel at Home. An Edict was published to compel them to deliver up the sacred Books. Those who complied, were looked on as Renouncers of the true Faith; but the brave Christian chose to submit to the worst Punishment, rather than be guilty of acting a Part, which too much resembled the Sin of *Judas*; and Christianity was preserved through their obstinate Zeal together with the BIBLE. Can then any one think, that *That* which supported the Christian Religion under such Difficulties, is not sufficient, if read and considered, to revive and advance it in peaceable Times? What was the Consequence of not allowing it to private Families, most of us know. The Doctrines of Men were put in the Place of revealed Truth; and Articles introduced, which had no Foundation in GOD's Word, or were contrary to it. The Scripture reformed us from these Errors, and Scripture must preserve us from returning to them; for the Mind destitute of GOD's Truth, is unarmed, and exposed to the Subtleties of Satan, and the Delusions of Men. What Attempts have been lately made to destroy the Credit of this Book, is evident to all, who observe the Diligence of a Set of Men, to compass the vain and romantick Design of rooting out

out sacred and revealed Truth. But I hope it is a Lesson to sincere Christians of every Rank to study it the more, since the Importance of it to support Christianity is confessed by their Enemies, while they spare no Pains to lessen its Authority, and wrest it, if possible, out of Mens Hands.

THE second Step towards reforming the Publick, by amending Families, is the good Example of the Heads of them. Example shews that the Rule is practicable ; as the Usefulness of it to the Ends of Life, that it came from a Being perfectly wise, who adapts his Laws to the Nature of Things. The great Legislator, the Son of GOD, who delivered a Rule both for publick Life, and private Oeconomy, did not attempt to reform the World by Precept alone. Whatsoever he pressed on the Consciences of Men, he punctually fulfilled, as Circumstances permitted, in his own Person. His whole Life was a Comment on the Rule, and an outward Expression of its great Power. The Faith, the Patience, the Obedience, and Love, inculcated by him, appeared in the Cures and Wonders he wrought ; in bearing Contradiction from the worst of Men, and submitting to Death, the Death of the Cross, to execute the Counsel of him who sent him. And the Tendency and Issue of the new Covenant, were displayed in Miniature in his Person, whose perfect Obedience was soon followed with a Train of Blessings, whereby we are taught, that by so obeying, we shall so triumph. Now *That* which was done by the Son of GOD, must be practised by Parents and
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Masters of Families in their private Sphere, that is, their Actions must confirm what their Mouth teaches; and the Fitness of the Rule, for the Peace and Happiness of the social Life, must be made to appear, from the good Effects that accrue to Families, from the Use of it; for these less Societies bear a Resemblance with greater Bodies. The good Conduct of a prudent Head, with the Comfort and Order consequent thereupon, both convince Beginners in the Path of Virtue, that the Difficulties of it are not invincible as Fear may represent, and further encourage them to try the Issue, which will more than recompence all that they suffer by persisting in it. The bright Example of so good a Man is not confined to his own Family. The Influence is extended as far as his Commerce. And it teaches those, who will not be reformed by Liberty of Speech. The good Liver is always instructing in a silent Way. His Course of Actions is a constant Lecture, and his whole Life a State of Contention with wicked Men. They see their Follies in his Perfections. And his rigid Virtue, if it cannot reform by testifying against them, yet will hardly fail to put them to Shame. *They that forsake the Law, says Solomon (a), praise the Wicked; but such as keep the Law contend with them.*

IF a Man, blessed with a sound Mind, and Riches sufficient to procure him the Pleasures and Amusements of Life, be found to employ them in a temperate Way, and in Acts of Beneficence to Mankind, turning his Back to sen-

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(a) Prov. xxviii. 4.

sual Delights, and directing his Countenance to something better, as his chief Good, than the World affords: What an Incitement to a Life of Virtue is not here given to his Friends and Family? His Temperance is his Choice, and not of Necessity. His Prudence secures him from Suspicion of Weakness. And they cannot but believe, from his steady Pursuit of what he is engaged in, that he would not have slighted a present Felicity, which many prefer, if a greater Pleasure did not arise from observing the Rule, than departing from it; and he had not been assured of a better Issue of renouncing the World, than conforming to it; the Hope of which can prevail more to confirm his Practice, than the best Advantages of this Life, to divert him from it. From this Observation, and these Thoughts, they proceed to consider the Grounds of his Conduct, which fortifying the Mind to resist Pleasure, shew their Sufficiency to support and comfort it in all Troubles. Whereas on the other Side, if Heads of Families cast off the Bands of Virtue and Truth, which they seem solicitous to impose on others; what an Occasion of Anger and Scorn is hereby administered to those under them! who may thus argue in their own Hearts; If you hate the Faults you reprove in others, why do you practise *That* which you hate? If you love the Duties you inculcate on them, why are you negligent in what you approve? They will resolve all into temporal Views, and not a Concern for their future Happiness; which they hardly can believe that any will consult, whose own Satisfaction

faction only arises from sensual Pleasure. The absurd Conduct may tempt them to suspect, that the Rule is contrived to enslave some for the Benefit of others; and Actions being considered as Interpreters of Words, it is no Wonder if they drop the Rule, that is painful and contrary to Flesh and Blood in its plain Sense, and follow the Comment agreeable to them.

THE last Step I shall here mention, towards reforming the Publick, by amending Families, is private Discipline. If the Rule of Truth, confirmed and explained in the Lives and Actions of virtuous Parents, Masters, or Governors, be yet disregarded by negligent, stubborn, and ill-disposed Youth, Discipline must succeed, and restrain *That* by timely Severity, which cannot be corrected by milder Methods. If they will not act as intelligent Beings, but become like Beasts that have no Understanding, they must not complain if they are treated like them. It is an Act of Pity exercised towards them, and a prudent Provision for our own Safety as well as others. It is an Act of Pity to the Sinners themselves, as it tends to prevent them from finishing their Sin; as it gives them Occasion to reflect on the Error of their past Conduct, and the Issue of pursuing the same Measures; and separates them from their Counsellors and Companions in Sin.

IT is a prudent Provision for our own Safety, since Vice unrestrained, will expose our Fortunes, Credit, and Persons, to the Frauds and Injuries of wicked Domesticks. And for others Safety, since the Rebel at home, will hardly be

quiet and orderly abroad. If a Child be refractory, or a Servant Slothful, Dishonest, or Profane, their Vices will follow them where-soever they go. Publick and Private make no Difference in this Matter. A change of Situation changes not Manners. Their Sin will operate in all Conditions, in every Air; and their Private appear in their Publick Behaviour. The Streets will ring with their Oaths and Curses; the Houses of Resort will proclaim their Excess. They will pursue their Follies as far as they can; and will not be backward, when their own is wasted, to supply their Wants out of other Men's Fortunes. They will be Knaves in Business, and Plunderers out of it. The Roads and the Streets will scarcely be free from their bold insults. The Simple and Industrious will be Tributary to them. And the honest Man, who strictly adheres to the Methods of Justice, and cannot retaliate Violence with Violence, or one Fraud with another, will find himself oppressed by a set of Men, for Protection from whom the Laws were appointed, and the Sword put into the Magistrate's Hand. The checking this Wickedness in its first Efforts, before it arrives at Confidence and Strength, is the Work of Families; for the Torrent of Iniquity is fed by Rivulets from these Springs.

CHILDREN are a Trust committed to Parents by Almighty GOD, to be trained and disciplined for his Service, and in such Manner as himself has prescribed; and not to be fashioned as their Friends please, whose temporal Views sometimes accomplish them more for the Service

vice of the God of this World, than the GOD of Heaven. Nor should Masters think, that a present Advantage, or the learning a Trade to procure the Conveniencies of a short Life, is the only End they are obliged to pursue in educating Youth. No; the Principal Business for which they were made, is to serve GOD, and express his Image in a Life of Virtue. This should be uppermost in every Office and Station of Life, and ought not to be prejudiced by any Contract or Covenant with Man. For which Reason, the want of Discretion in a Child removed from his Parents Care, should be constantly supplied by the Master's Prudence, and every Thing be done to reform or improve, which the Friends themselves should have done for him, had the Youth continued under their Government. Does he come recommended with a good Education? 'tis the Master's Duty to finish the Work, as far as he can, so happily begun. Is he cursed with a bad One? it no less becomes him to undo all; and add this to the worldly benefits received from him, that by sound Instruction and due Restraint, he become the Parent of the Child's Hope of a better Life. But what a Reproach would it cast on him, should a good Education be suffered to be lost, or a bad one to continue in his Family through his Fault! or what Satisfaction would it prove to the Youth, that he has gained an Art, which only can profit him in this Life, at the expence of Innocence, Virtue, and Truth, which, if duely cultivated, would have made him happy in both Worlds? The like Conduct should be
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shewn by Masters, with proper Abatements, to their other Servants: But if after all, the inbred Iniquity awed and kept under by private Discipline, cast off Restraint when the Servant is freed, or the Child attains to the Stature of Man; or impatient of Reproof, flies for Relief to the Patrons of Wickedness; the Publick Discipline succeeds the Private, and the stubborn Neck, which would not submit to the Yoke of Wood, is forced to bend down to the Yoke of Iron.

IF they still contend with National Justice, as they did with Private, and Punishments repeated only produce repetition of Sin, a general good will however result from extream Punishment, the Publick will be freed from Enemies to Order, Industry, and Peace; the Scandal of Example be removed out of it; the Sober be admonished to avoid their Fate, by persisting in the righteous and sure Way; the Novices in Wickedness, not to proceed in a Course of Life, which will probably end in the same Ruin; and the Prosperous and Old, to reflect on the Patience and Forbearance of God, which if still neglected, will surely be followed with greater Severities in the next World, should they prove so lucky in their own Conceit, as not to go off by the Punishments of this. To which may be added, that the due Execution of National Justice, will preserve the Publick from the Guilt and Punishment of Sin unrestrained.

This then is the Sum of what has been said, in relation to the Method of reforming the Age.

Age. The Rule of Duty is conveyed to us in the sacred Books, the Study of which should be followed and encouraged in private Families. The Grace of God will assist the honest and sincere Heart. That which is learned must be shewn and illustrated in good Works; and Example confirm what Instruction inculcates. The hard Heart must be plowed with Discipline for the good Seed. By which Method, Knowledge and Virtue, founded in Youth, and cherished in Families, will shine in their Beauty, Stature, and Strength in Maturity of Years, and adorn the Publick with useful Subjects for the various Business of the social Life. The unhappy few, who will not be worked on by milder Methods, must be taught Obedience by the heavier Strokes of National Justice; in bringing them to which, if honest, virtuous, and reputable Men are sometimes concerned, they should not be blamed for an Act of Compassion to the Sinners themselves, or for timely providing for their own Safety, who must otherwise share with these bold Criminals in the common Ruin, as joint Members of the same Body, should Sin unrestrained by human Authority, swell to that Bulk, as to call down Vengeance on the whole Nation.

OF what Consequence so venerable an Assembly, as is here gathered, must necessarily be in promoting the Work of Reforming Manners, we may well infer from the Stations and Authority, the known Virtues and Abilities of many; who strengthened with Laws, both human and divine, and supported by Magistrates,
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and the greater Succours coming from Above, will trample down Wickedness, and advance Righteousness in due Time, as the Power of GOD shall march on before them, and prepare their Way. It is no Discouragement to considerate Men, if a good Work sometime proceed but with slow Steps, and bold Iniquity rear up its Head with renewed Rage. For Virtue and Knowledge gain on the Soul by little and little, as the springing Light prevails on the Earth by Seconds and Minutes, except in Cases where GOD is pleased to discover the Force and Efficacy of Grace, in compendious Instances of Goodness to Men. It is not improbable, that some Opposition to this good Work, may be suffered to continue, to exercise Patience, to add Experience to other Talents, and increase Faith and Dependance on GOD for a happy Success; but notwithstanding this Opposition, the Cause of Religion will surely prevail, the Progress of which, the longer it is hindered by contrary Measures, will be so much the swifter, when the Rubs are removed that lie in the Way; and the Labourers in it, the more they are exercised by obstinate Sinners, will be more furnished, like polished Shafts, to pass through the Heart of the Body of Sin. The bold Stand which is sometimes made by overgrown Vice, is no more a Sign of confirmed Power, than it was to *Jericho* of invincible Strength, that its thick Walls did not fall down at the first Sounding of the sacred Trumpets. And its fierce Assaults in severe Censures, and bitter Words, will as little avail in the Issue of Things, to prevent the Increase

crease of Virtue and Truth, as the Wind and the Waves to keep back the Vessel that was carrying Christ to the opposite Shore. There is something in Iniquity boisterous and bold; it conceals its Weakness in an Air of Terror; its Onset is fierce, and Retreat contemptible. But it is otherwise with Virtue, which is mild and modest; it acts without Tumult; its Courage increases together with the Contest, and appears glorious in its full Strength, when the other languishes, faints, and expires. It is God's Decree, that *the Earth shall be full of the Knowledge of the Lord (a), as the Waters cover the Sea*; But since GOD operates by second Causes, let this worthy Body of the Church militant join its Endeavours to the Counsel of GOD, with Meekness, Patience, Prudence, and Love, every Member in his several Sphere, and his different Way, as their various Talents fit and invite them; and the Fruit will appear of their good Offices in due Season. However, if the Time should be prolonged, and others should reap what they now sow; yet this is their Comfort, that they cannot fail of the hoped for Reward, Christ assuring us, that *both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together*. To which Joy, may GOD bring us in due Time, through Perseverance in well doing, for Jesus Christ his Sake, to whom, &c.

(a) Isa. xi. 9.

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